

The Hearing Journal

Portrayal of ‘hearing loss’ and ‘hearing aids’ in the United States newspaper media

Beukes, EW & Manchaiah, V

Introduction

Despite an increase in the prevalence of hearing loss due to an ageing populations and recreational noise exposure, hearing related help-seeking and hearing aid uptake remain low.

¹ Reasons for this low uptake include poor acceptance of hearing loss, stigma, cost, or technology concerns.² What has received less attention, is considering how these opinions are actually shaped and from where their origin is. The role of social and environmental attitudes towards hearing loss and subsequent uptake of hearing aids may be overlooked. The media has an important role in shaping societal perceptions, attitudes, and/or beliefs. Although many forms of media outlets are present, the public consider newspaper as one of the most reliable sources of information.³ Newspaper media is a persuasive tool that heavily influences perceptions and interpretations.⁴ The public thus continue to read newspapers to obtain knowledge and form opinions and make decisions. Many rely on newspapers as a source of information, without even thinking whether the content it is true or not. They are more likely to discuss topics that the media feature. This is seen within hearing health care as well. Audiologist will often have patients walk into an appointment holding a newspaper cutting regarding a hearing aid feature they want to know more about.

Hearing health care research has to date paid little attention to the influence of the media on hearing health care behaviour. A recent study by Manchaiah, Ratinaud & Beukes (2018)⁵ explored how newspapers portray ‘hearing loss’ and ‘hearing aids’. Specifically, this study examined: (a) themes (or patterns) within the newspaper articles; and (b) change of themes over time to examine the trends in media portrayal. This is an important first step in identifying what kind of content is discussed in the newspaper media. This study may be of interest to hearing health care professionals to inform them of which newspaper content may help contribute to the public’s knowledge of hearing health care.

This study employed cross-sectional analysis of secondary data generated from the publicly available newspaper media data. The search terms “hearing loss” and “hearing aid(s)” were searched in the database, the U.S. Major Dailies by ProQuest, for newspaper articles published during the years 1990–2017. Two separate data sets were generated and were analysing using a text-pattern analysis (i.e., Cluster analysis and Chi-square analysis) using the open-source IRaMuTeQ software.

Findings regarding newspapers representation of hearing loss and hearing aids

The majority of articles about ‘hearing loss’ were from the Washington Post (26%), US Federal News Services (15%), Chicago Tribune (14%) and Targeted News Service (13%). Interestingly for hearing aid articles, the greatest source was the US federal News Services (50%). Other sources included the Washington Post (8%), Chicago Tribune (8%), The New York Times (7%), and Targeted News Service (7%).

Time series analysis indicated that over time the frequency of information about these terms expanded (see Figure 1). It is however not known if this is as a result of an increase in focus on these topics, increase in number of media outlets, or for both reasons. The cluster analysis

resulted in 7 clusters and 8 clusters in ‘hearing loss’ and ‘hearing aid(s)’ text corpus respectively (see Table 1). Also, the Chi-square analysis suggested the clusters that were overrepresented in each year (see Table 1). Results suggest that newspapers provide a wide and realistic portrayal regarding hearing loss and hearing aids. It is interesting to note that the theme ‘cognitive hearing science’ is more prevalent during the recent years (i.e., 2012-16) in hearing loss text corpus and the theme ‘signal processing’ is more prevalent during the years 2010-16. These observations may highlight the trends in the newspaper media which is reflecting the discussions happening in the hearing health care profession.

[Insert figure 1 around here]

Table 1: Cluster analysis results showing the themes within the ‘hearing loss’ and ‘hearing aid(s)’ newspaper media text corpus

Hearing loss theme (statistically more featured time period)	Frequency in %	Hearing aid theme (statistically more featured time period)	Frequency in %
Cognitive hearing science (2012 to 2016)	6	Research and development	5
Early identification and diagnosis (2005 to 2009)	9	Insurance	9
Noise exposure	10	Wireless and connectivity (2005-2007)	11
Research and development	12	Innovation	12
Prevalence	14	Features to address background noise	14
Health promotion and prevention	22	Activities and relationships (1990-2004)	16
Causes and consequences (1990 to 2004)	26	signal processing (2010-2016)	20

What are the implications for hearing health professionals?

This study has highlighted the importance for the hearing health professional to keep up to date with the news media. The themes presented here may indicate what kind of information the public are exposed to and this may have a role in educating the public on hearing loss and promoting self-management and healthy behaviours regarding early diagnosis and management. Moreover, it is evident that the media reflects the trends in hearing health care and thus keeping the public informed of the latest research and advances in hearing aid developments.

Although the current study highlights the main hearing related topics covered in the newspaper during 1990-2017, these could change in time. It is important to consider that the media views, as their influence may be substantial. This will aid pre-empting what presuppositions society has regarding hearing health care. Understanding the topics covered in the media will help hearing health care professionals better prepared to address questions and concerns raised by patients and their family members during clinical consultations. Tapping into topics that have recently received media coverage (such as cognitive hearing science or signal processing) may engage patients and increase your credibility as a health care provider from the public’s view point. It is important to note that topics discussed in the

media, especially social media, can affect patient and health care professional's relationship, by leading to more equal communication between them.⁶

Newspaper media is only one type of media source. The influence of other media sources, in particular social media should be considered and how people engage with these sources.⁷ The information shared on these forms may be different to that found in this study. Hence, to ensure the general public are appropriately informed, hearing health professionals and organizations should also be more proactive in shaping what information is provided in the media. By working with journalists in developing content for media sources, hearing health care professionals have the opportunity to promote healthy management of hearing.

Figure heading

Figure 1: The number of text related to hearing loss or hearing aid identified in newspaper media overt time

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Author Bio's

Eldre Beukes, PhD is the Post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas

Vinaya Manchaiah, AuD, MBA, PhD, is the Jo Mayo Endowed Professor at the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas

Correspondence:

Email: vmanchaiah@lamar.edu

Tel: +1 (409) 880 8927

Author Headshots

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